Tenerezza

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/945207.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham & Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter
Additional Tags:	Ficlets, Hannigram - Freeform, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence
Language:	English
Series:	Part 3 of down the rabbit hole
Stats:	Published: 2013-08-28 Words: 3,714 Chapters: 1/1

Tenerezza

by amare

Summary

The au!Hannibal and Will from 'through a glass' return from their date to the opera.

Notes

Originally I had a collection called "Remnants" where I posted ficlets/codas that didn't belong to the bigger fic proper, but I've decided to section things off and do it a different way.

The silence continued from the car to the front door, through the foyer, and finally made itself comfortable upstairs while Will struggled to undo his cufflinks. He had hands built for detail work, that worked in small spaces and at cramped angles easily, but that night his coordination eluded him. His fingertips shook as he worked at the small fasteners, and his spine stiffened when he heard Hannibal follow him into the master bedroom.

It wasn't unkind, the silence. It never was with Hannibal; he was effortless in dodging Will's innate ability to make things uncomfortable, and he took Will's lack of grace with an astounding amount of it. After the concert, his only attempt at broaching the ballooning wall of personal space and self-recrimination Will was building around him in the passenger seat had been to ask if he wanted to go home or to Hannibal's. He chose Hannibal's. He couldn't leave things as they were, go back to Wolf Trap and languish in his own frustration over how poorly the date had gone. Better to go and hash it out, even if Will couldn't get more than a word to pour from his mouth since leaving the building; all of his apologies and explanations built up in his throat like sneeze that wouldn't quite come.

Hannibal busied himself with peeling off his own tux. Will was still working on the second of his cufflinks by the time Hannibal was hanging his trousers neatly in his garment bag, no doubt to be dry-cleaned by some exacting and expensive hand later. Hannibal didn't ask if he needed help, but Will could feel his gaze like a heavy weight.

"I'll fix us a nightcap," Hannibal said, and Will distractedly glanced up to see him behind, near the doorway, a distorted impression instead of a face with features because of Hannibal's antique mirror.

Will only nodded. He set his second cufflink down with its brother and finally started to shrug off his dress shirt. Hannibal was still standing in the threshold, though, and Will watched him in the mirror until he spoke again.

"There's pajamas in the third drawer; you're welcome to use them."

"Thanks," Will said. Another phrase built up; his jaw ached to let it loose, but Hannibal disappeared to go downstairs at last.

He was alone with himself and his petulance at last. The body that he revealed in a hurry from underneath his penguin costume was thankfully familiar; the face that stared out at him when he got dressed that afternoon, after a close shave and an attempt to wrangle his hair into some sort of style, was far less so. He felt like someone's imitation of Will Graham, and not a very good one. He wasn't convincing, either as himself or as someone who routinely donned a tuxedo to take in blue-blood entertainment.

He'd held out fine through their arrival; he kept a fair amount of distance between them, not enough to suggest intimacy but enough to ensure people knew he was Hannibal's guest. And it was – fine. Will enjoyed opera; it brought him back to childhood, the LP's of Don Giovanni and La Triviata and Carmen that his mother had bought, Will thought, in an attempt to seem cultured. He found them in his grandparent's shed, some of them unsalvageable they were so

poorly stored, and he played them on quiet Sundays, brought them along for the first few moves. He'd stopped when his dad refused to drag around a record player in their pickup. The LPs were left behind in Biloxi, fodder for the landlord or the new tenants to deal with. But his opera knowledge hadn't actually entailed *going* to the opera, and it didn't include anything more obscure than Wagner.

But there was no one ready to quiz him about his favorite obscure composers, to ask how he knew Hannibal; Hannibal led them to their seats and studied the program with him at length, forgoing their usual unspoken rule of personal space to let his thigh gently press against Will's, a measure of comfort he gladly took. And it was still fine, even as the room filled with people and too much perfume, the tinkling of fake laughs and cabochon jewelry. Even as Will felt the burgeoning interest of Baltimore society notice him at Hannibal Lecter's side; *who was he? Why were they seated immediately? Why didn't Dr. Lecter mingle in the lobby?* He kept his eyes down and his attention mostly on Hannibal.

Will didn't know Poulenc from Puccini, but the performance was lively, the orchestra talented; he knew enough about the French Revolution, and enough kitchen-French, to make out what was going on. In the darkened auditorium, he felt like he was nearly anyone. On a date, fitting in with his pressed and tailored tuxedo – a gift from Hannibal, once Will sprung the idea of the opera on him – with someone at his side.

He spotted the glimmer of opera glasses in his direction more than once, but it was still tolerable. They weren't curious because he was an obvious freak; they were curious because he was an oddity, unfamiliar in their territory. He zeroed his attention back on the stage, the costumed nuns, and let the heat from Hannibal's firm thigh ground him.

And then it all went to hell during the intermission.

Hannibal silently steered him to the champagne and savored his glass with a smile while Will downed his in three or four sips. Will knew what it looked like; his stiff posture, pale face, darting eyes, drinking like a lush at the first chance he got. But he didn't have the words to correct any misconception, and he hoped that Hannibal would do what he usually did and read between the obvious lines of Will's behavior to the less-obvious motivation.

"We can go home, if you like," Hannibal had said, smiling at an onlooker who gave them a wave and scoping out a tray of Hors d'oeuvres in nearly the same moment.

"No, I don't want to leave. I'm enjoying the opera." Will had stared at his empty glass, not sure what to do with it, yearning for another to take its place, and Hannibal saw his quandary and exchanged their drinks until Will held Hannibal's mostly full flute and Hannibal his empty. Will took a slow sip. "And it was my idea to come, remember? It's not an imposition to be here."

Hannibal's expression shifted slightly, a little softer around the eyes; fondness, probably, but his mouth was nearly a moue. Exasperated, too. "I know you said you wanted full disclosure with regards to our relationship, but I hadn't imagined you'd want the equivalent of a coming-out ball."

Will snorted into his champagne, caught himself, and turned it into a gentle cough. "It was this or the Bureau's Christmas party. I prefer librettos to Jack's yelling."

Hannibal turned amused eyes on him, and Will watched the corners of them widen with surprise for a split second. It in turn raised his own hackles, and he clutched his champagne with white knuckles. "What is it?" Will had asked.

"Hannibal!" A lilting, all-too-interested voice pierced through Will's fog of alarm. "I wasn't expecting to see you tonight. And with a companion."

The rest of that conversation was a deliberate blur. Will had been stone-faced and brusque when he wasn't awkward, and the rush of heat he'd felt over Hannibal introducing him as his date was so encompassing it had stained his face red. Some woman with a neck like a bird of prey and elbow-length gloves pressed eagerly for details, and at one point she gestured over a photographer with an honest-to-God flash bulb mounted at the top of his camera.

He knew he had to have looked like terrified deer in that picture, he dreaded its publication, but he remembered Hannibal stepping up and softly steering him into something like a pose, a kind and steadying hand at the small of his back. His body was slowly tuning itself according to Hannibal's touch, and it kindled a reaction in him, an automatic reshaping of his limbs and his stiff back until he almost seemed like a person again, as opposed to an ill-tempered mannequin. Almost. And his goddamn jacket was unbuttoned. He realized it once the flash had gone off.

Once that crisis was over, Will had nearly taken back his earlier insistence of staying. He couldn't take it; there were more eyes on him, more people roving toward them, and Hannibal murmured something that was lost to the space between them as another person broke through the milling crowd.

It was Hannibal's former patient and his friend, or date, whatever. And Will scarcely remembered that conversation as well, quickly becoming drunk on his empty stomach and anxiety, sweat under his arms and at the backs of his knees. He'd felt like a squirming bug under a microscope, and Hannibal's proximity, his easy fielding of an awkward situation, had barely improved matters.

Finally, when the lights indicated the second half was to begin, Will tore himself away, jostling a table as he went. He was too wrapped up in himself to be embarrassed in the moment, but he felt the reactions of the people in the room surge all at once, engulf him. *Who is that yokel Hannibal brought? Is this some kind of joke?* He felt himself dismissed entirely within the span of thirty seconds, and it was a difficult feeling to shake.

The rest of the performance was lent a haze of drunkenness and misery. Will hoped Hannibal had at least enjoyed himself, but he doubted it. And then he'd been silent – sulky, even – the entire way out of the building, into the car, giving clipped answers to hushed questions.

Will stood in Hannibal's bedroom wearing his briefs and hair gel that was startling to crackle, his stomach twisted with how badly he wanted to take back the whole stupid night. It was his idea, not Hannibal's, and it was possible Hannibal hadn't even wanted to bring him there, that

he knew it was going to be a disaster and had only humored Will.

Sighing, he viciously mussed his hair, breaking it free of the gel's last hold. It still didn't look right, but he was closer to himself again. He found the pajamas Hannibal had bought for him, thankfully nothing as fancy as what he himself went for, just a navy blue pair of some roomy cotton.

When he dragged himself downstairs, Hannibal was sitting in the living room in one of his overstuffed leather chairs, robe tightly knotted closed over his own nightclothes. A half a tumbler of what Will knew was his favorite whiskey sat near his elbow, a twin near the couch for Will.

A small, embarrassing part of Will wanted to curl up around Hannibal's legs, rub his cheek into the soft satin of his robe. It was such an desperate, pathetic desire for comfort that he found himself irritated by it, striding toward the couch with jerky limbs. He took up the whiskey and downed half of it standing, then collapsed onto the couch in a slouch. "Thanks for the pajamas," he said, cradling the glass on his stomach and gazing up at the paint on Hannibal's walls where it met ceiling. He thought he might offer to do it for him, next time he wanted to refresh or change the color; Will enjoyed painting, and it was one of the few skills he had to offer Hannibal, practically speaking.

"I thought you might like them. It's getting colder."

"I put out heat like a furnace," Will pointed out, a fact Hannibal knew well. "But thanks." It was something he was working on; if Hannibal gave him a reasonable gift – and all of his gifts had been reasonable, practical, nothing extravagant by anyone's standards but Will's – he just said 'thank you.' After the first 'thank you, but I can't,' Hannibal turned a thoughtful, understanding expression on him and just asked, 'but why not, Will?,' and he had no answer that wasn't rooted in stubbornness. He figured he'd save up all of his indignation and inadequacy for a fight he might actually win, one day.

"I'm sorry you didn't enjoy yourself tonight."

Will sighed, lolling his head against the back of the couch for a moment to really revel in how much he did not want to have their current conversation before sitting up. The room went topsy-turvy for a brief moment, then leveled out to show Hannibal studying him in the dim living room light.

"I did, up to a point. It really wasn't your fault I didn't, either."

Hannibal picked up the whiskey and swirled it with a small rotation of his wrist. "And it wasn't your fault. You were ill-prepared, and I couldn't keep the sharks at bay."

Will smiled a little at that. Hannibal floated through the upper class like, well, one of them, but he seemed as amused by their antics as Will would have been, had Will been relaxed enough to feel amusement. "You should frame that picture. Will's First Opera. Or what was it -- Will's Debutante Ball? God, I must have looked hunted." He took a sip and tried to wash away all the feelings he had associated with that fucking picture. He hadn't even seen it, and

he knew it was awful.

"Debutante implies your availability."

"Mmm. And I'm not available." That was somewhat comforting. He didn't think Hannibal was going to dump him unceremoniously after he'd mucked up his first – social outing, not after he'd put so much effort into dating Will in the first place, but an irrational part of him was soothed by the reminder. "Aren't I a little past marrying age anyway? Am I considered a spinster by now?"

Hannibal let his attempt at humor subside, taking a long drink of his own. "It's becoming increasingly clear that what you think I want from you is entirely different from what I actually do."

Will let his head thunk back down to the edge of the couch again. "No," he said, eyes closed. "I really thought the opera would be good for both of us. I didn't think, *oh, what's some stuffy date Hannibal would pick*? I misjudged, but it wasn't because I wanted to make you ..." He heaved a frustrated breath, his explanation falling flat despite countless versions of it having time to play themselves out in his head earlier. "It wasn't because I was doing something I didn't want to."

"I'm glad to hear it. We both misjudged. We should have started small."

Will craned his neck and peered at Hannibal from a very odd angle. "We've done small. We were running out of places to be clandestine. And I told you, I don't want to sneak around."

"There's sneaking around, and then there's attending one of the biggest society events in Baltimore, in full view of the press." Hannibal did not sound like he was rebuking him; he was rueful, knowing he'd played a part in their disastrous attempt at a date. Will didn't think it was anyone's responsibility to keep him on an even keel but his own, though he understood Hannibal's sense of responsibility. Hannibal enjoyed finery, he liked the trappings, the tux, the whole performance, and he was pleased to share something a little more his speed. They could only have so many dinners in, followed by enthusiastic and still slightly awkward fucking, before it got old.

Or so Will assumed. The dinner and fucking hadn't actually gotten old yet. He was just planning for inevitability.

He'd thought Hannibal could indulge in his trappings, and Will could shut his eyes and just enjoy the opera, maybe act like a somewhat normal human for once. He was wrong, and he knew it going in; there was nothing for it now.

"Well, maybe next time we can go to the museum or something. Unless former patients are going to swarm us there too."

Hannibal smiled at him. "Do you like museums?"

"Sort of. Kind of. It depends." He swallowed the rest of his whiskey, the uncomfortable

position he was in nearly making it come back up and burn his nose, and stretched a little. "I'll make sure it's an interesting exhibit."

There was still an amorphous unease in the back of Will's mind, but he ignored it; they were all right. Neither of them was terribly big on grand gestures; Hannibal had only needed reassurance that Will hadn't tortured himself out of some masochistic desire to please, and Will just needed time to calm down, to reorient himself. The alcohol simmered a nice buzz in his veins, and he could tune out the parts of himself who still shouted that this was a bad idea, that the opera was the first of many missteps he was going to make, that eventually this would get old and exhausting. There was a reason Will did not, could not, sustain relationships, and his first with a man – with a man like Hannibal Lecter – was too strange to last.

Enjoy it while it does, he told himself, standing up, steadier than he ought to have been. Hannibal's eyes were heavy-lidded as he watched Will come closer. Will gauged that he could easily share the oversized chair with Hannibal, that he would welcome to close press of them together on it, but he often felt like a child playing at whatever it was they had, so didn't sit on Hannibal's lap to avoid further association.

"If we practice my people skills, maybe we can do the Christmas party after all."

Hannibal grimaced. "Perhaps once Jack Crawford has had time to adjust."

Will couldn't help a snicker. Hannibal caught the edge of his hand and tugged it closer, tangling their fingers with a light touch. Will fought casting a meaningful look back at the stairwell; they'd get to bed sooner or later. "Your loathing for my boss is one of the great joys in life."

"I don't *loathe* Jack. In general I admire him."

"Just not when it comes to me," Will finished.

Hannibal said nothing. His thumb pressed into the meat of Will's palm, rubbing slow pressure there.

"I don't know if I told you, but you look good in a tux," Will said, sounding a lot less smooth than he had in his head. But it was an honest compliment, and Hannibal should have been able to see it as one.

"Thank you. You looked exquisite."

Will laughed a little, turning his gaze around the room until he was unembarrassed enough to take the compliment and look near Hannibal's face again. "Yeah, sweaty, uncultured teacher is a really hot look."

Hannibal dropped his hand and stood; Will stepped back to make room for him. Though there was only a slight difference in their heights, he seemed to loom. He face was purposeful, intense. "I don't give platitudes, Will. I was pleased to be seen with you, until it became obvious that you were under far too much stress."

Will shrugged a shoulder that felt limp. People had certainly found him attractive before, his face or even his mind, but rarely had they been interested in the two at once, found compliments for both when they knew them wholly. Or as wholly as anyone could know Will's mind.

Hannibal found him appealing, and he did it so casually and easily that Will barely had time to be self-conscious or skeptical – he'd looked, but he'd never found a dark or ulterior motive under Hannibal's veneer of appreciation. All he had to do was be admired and perhaps admire back, and even that he couldn't accomplish. He didn't know what words to use. It would have been easier if Hannibal were a woman, but only marginally, Will supposed.

"Thanks," he said eventually, quietly.

Hannibal kissed him, and Will traded their clumsy conversation for something he was more adept at. Brought so close, the smell of his cologne was encircling; he'd been so concerned for Will's state of mind that he'd forgone his usual shower. That was, if Will put aside his instinctual need to rebel at the first sign of coddling, oddly nice. They both tried to accommodate for the other against their natural habits.

The inside of Hannibal's mouth was smooth and wet, and he took the weight Will leaned against him without the slightest sway. Normally anything that could hint at constraint made Will nervous, and Hannibal was sturdier than Will by far, but even the hands holding Will's hips were considerate; at most, they were persistent. He gave Hannibal's lower lip a hard, appreciative suck and pulled back to breathe.

"Bed," Will insisted.

For an answer, Hannibal scraped his teeth against Will's neck, near his collarbone. Will's hands were already working at the knot of his robe; it seemed as though Hannibal always wore several layers, all of them designed to make undressing a pain in the ass. When he encountered a tiny row of buttons on his pajamas that ran from just under Hannibal's neck to the middle of his hips, Will dropped his hands with a huff of defeat.

Will went up the stairs first; Hannibal took an extra few moments to return their glasses to the sink, turn off all the lights, and check his alarm system; basically the same circuit he made every night. When he made it upstairs, Will pulled off his pajama top, a ghosting touch of fabric that felt implicative, and let himself be looked at, his skin tightening in the cool air. Hannibal turned off the light after a moment, but he found Will unerringly in the mostly-dark, a warm palm broad against Will's sensitive stomach.

He touched his mouth to Will's bare shoulder and guided him into bed, the covers susurrant around them as they moved together. Will felt dizzy, so he shut his eyes and pulled Hannibal closer.

It was never easy to do this, to be so physically close to someone, no matter how much his skin seemed to crave it, his nipples drawing painfully tight with the slightest touch; in the dark, though, and with Hannibal, it became easier each time.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!